

## Module A: Social, Cultural and Historical Context

<i>Richard III 1592</i>	<i>Ways of Thinking</i>	<i>Looking for Richard 1996</i>	<i>Ways of Thinking</i>
<b>Historical context:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The power began shifting from the Church when Elizabeth's father Henry VIII defied the Pope and made himself Head of the Church of England. He united the notion of Church and State. Machiavelli's <i>The Prince</i>: 'Politics have no relation to morals' and the perspective that the end justifies the means was known by Shakespeare's audience. Although the political unrest has seemingly lessened, Elizabeth had no heir; however, she did have the respect and support of most of her subjects.</li> <li>With a time of relative peace in 1592 (with the exception of the ongoing war with Spain), the role of the knight and soldiers was no longer essential. Elizabeth's hold on the throne was more secure as the threats from the Catholics, whilst still present, were not as overt. Her cousin Mary Queen of Scots who had posed the strongest threat had been beheaded in 1587.</li> <li>The right to seek vengeance for a perceived wrong had been embraced. These blood feuds would often be settled by a duel or</li> </ul>	<b>Shift in political paradigm:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Renaissance humanism influenced society culturally, philosophically and politically. The Dutch thinker, Erasmus, wrote of mankind as central to the world, and this humanist concern was the basis of most Renaissance thought. Philosopher Pico conveyed his respect and faith in humanity and in man's ability to determine the course of his own life. Influenced by Plato, Pico believed that humanity was capable of being divine. Pico asserted that humanity's uniqueness stems from the freedom to determine their direction and purpose in life. In contrast French Philosopher Montaigne rejected Pico's belief in humanity's divinity and nobility. He embraced the philosophy of skepticism "man is a marvellously vain, inconsistent, and unstable thing, and on whom it is</li> </ul>	<b>Historical Context:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of trust and faith in politicians in a postmodern world that had witnessed the terrible loss of life in World War II, Korea and Vietnam, and the rise of fascism and oppression. The controversial president Richard Nixon had resigned as president in 1974 after a near-impeachment. "They canvas like politicians, complete with lies and innuendo."</li> <li>Pacino is a neo-liberalist who supports the Democrat's policies and philosophy. Pacino is fascinated by Richard's machinations and his ability to use rhetoric to manipulate and deceive others.</li> <li>During the wars and the post war periods politicians exploited the power of language to control and deceive.</li> </ul>	<b>Shift in political paradigm:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The faith and trust in the American government was no longer a given. Society in a postmodern world of cynicism was openly questioning the honesty and transparency of their politicians. Redgrave states 'The truth is that those in power have total contempt for everything they promise, everything they pledge, and this is really what Shakespeare's great play is really about.'. Pacino embraces Jan Kott's view of Richard as a fascist dictator symbolised by the riding crop that he carries. Postmodern cynicism and existential philosophy have paved the way for Pacino's selection of this play as one that would connect with a 20<sup>th</sup> century audience, and ensured that he focuses on Richard's abuse of power, approbation of evil and his ability to dupe and manipulate others.</li> <li>Pacino and the actors mirror Shakespeare's recognition of the power of the word to manipulate and deceive.</li> </ul>

<p>other violent retributive action. In the late 1500's, Elizabeth regarded it as a lawless act against the State that threatened her legislative bodies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The political role of theatre in this period further reflects the intent of <i>King Richard III</i> that advocates the political rights of the Tudors and maligns Richard III and the House of York. History plays became increasingly popular after 1588 and the defeat of the Spanish Armada, reflecting a growing patriotic consciousness.</li> <li>▪ The power of rhetoric to manipulate, control and deceive had been an important consideration in Ancient Greece and Rome. Queen Elizabeth admired Julius Caesar and was a prolific writer. On the eve of the Spanish Armada in 1588 she delivered the now famous speech at Tilbury. <i>'I know I have the body of a weak, feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king - and of a king of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm; to which, rather than any dishonour should grow by me, I myself will take up arms - I myself will be your</i></li> </ul>	<p>very hard to form any certain and uniform judgment" (<i>Essays</i>, 1.1).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Thus, Richard is a Vice and a Renaissance Machiavel who defies God and the Divine Right of Kings, to drive his own destiny. Shakespeare's representation of Richard as a villain reflects Montaigne's concerns about humanity's flaws and reinforces to the audience Elizabeth's right to the throne.</li> <li>▪ Shakespeare illustrates the terrible consequences of defying God and suppressing humanity for power, and compromising the core values of moderation, integrity and compassion. <i>"But he has let the pursuit of power totally corrupt him. He is alienated from his own body and his own self"</i> (Kimble).</li> <li>▪ His villains die alone without respect or love - <i>'There is no creature loves me, / And if I die no soul shall pity me.'</i> (Av, iii)</li> <li>▪ Shakespeare captures in Richard the shift from a</li> </ul>		<p>However, he also commends the beauty and lyricism of the language.</p>
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<p><i>general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field.'</i></p>	<p>military state focused on national security to a more cultured world that favoured university trained, cultured leaders. Richard's opening soliloquy conveys his criticism of a time of peace that does not need him to be a military man. The extended metaphor of the ocean symbolises the sweeping changes that were occurring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Under the Tudors, the move towards a more centralised understanding of power under a monarchy was being developed. The characters, such as Margaret, frequently speak aggressively and venomously about vengeance. Shakespeare privileges moderation and compassion.</li> <li>▪ The valuing of the Ancient Greek and Roman art and ways of thinking revived the focus on the power of rhetoric. Shakespeare demonstrates the power of language through Richard who cleverly plays with language and uses Buckingham who is a master of rhetoric to ensure</li> </ul>		
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	that his ambitions are realised.		
<p><b>Cultural context - Theatre:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In 1558 Queen Elizabeth issued a decree controlling the performance of plays; all scripts were subject to censorship. Sir Francis Walsingham, the Queen's spymaster, founded The Queen's Men in 1583 as a political mouthpiece. Their role was to spread Protestantism and royalist propaganda through a divided realm.</li> <li>▪ Influence of the Morality Play and birth of the modern tragedy evident in this Historical Tragedy. Shakespeare adopts a providential view of history as an organising framework and draws on the Vice character of the Christian Morality play to create a play that is beginning to reflect the modern fascination with the central character. However, Richard moves beyond the Vice figure and a Machiavel as he is very human and even invites a modicum of sympathy in places. The Vice who represented the seductive power of the Devil seduced Everyman to succumb to temptations. The morality play was structured around the psychomachia, the conflict</li> </ul>	<p><b>Renaissance humanism:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Theatre mirrored the transformation of theatre in Elizabethan England. The decisive factor was the rebirth of Greek and Roman tragedy that centred on humanity's flaws. Renaissance literature shifted away from the religious and metaphysical subjects of earlier medieval literature. The movement towards the renaissance humanist approach to life influenced the development of characters who were becoming more human. Richard breaches the gap between the Vice in the morality play.</li> <li>▪ Richard's role as the director of the action reminds the audience of his determination to control his fate and connects the Vice character in the morality play who dictated the action to the emerging very human character. More importantly, Shakespeare conveys powerfully the role of the writer and the actor to</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cultural context - Hollywood:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All productions unquestionably accept Shakespeare's representation of Richard as a villain. Pacino has continued this reading of Richard's character. Pacino recognises that Shakespeare's Richard is a product of humanism and represents a time of change - <i>'This guy Richard...make up your mind...what is he? First you say he's a kind of devil, then you say he's a kind of mad court jester. Then, he's a dead ringer for a kind of medieval Vice. Whatever that is? And then he's described as some sort of scourge of god or Machiavelli, and somehow at the end we're meant to feel some pity for him...weird?'</i></li> <li>▪ <i>'It has always been a dream of mine to communicate how I feel about Shakespeare to others.'</i> Pacino's driving purpose is to connect a modern American audience with Shakespeare. A stream-of-consciousness 'drama' documentary that is a deliberate pastiche of cuts from interviews with actors and scholars juxtaposed with impromptu vox populi with people on the streets of New York City to bring Shakespeare to the general public.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Postmodernism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century heralded the birth of postmodern cynicism. Audiences in Hollywood are drawn to the dark villain who mirrors the loss of innocence and the relentless egocentric pursuit of power and control. Pacino embraces Shakespeare's representation of Richard's descent into evil and draws upon his numerous roles as a Mafioso villain.</li> <li>▪ Pacino is determined to reconnect Hollywood with the complexities, textual integrity and masterful use of language of Shakespeare's plays.</li> <li>▪ Postmodernism influenced the development of texts that reminded the audience that they were a construct. Playfulness, pastiche and self-reflexivity were the hallmarks.</li> </ul>

<p>between Good and Evil over the human soul. Although the character of Richard has its origins in the Vice - <i>‘Thus like the formal Vice, Iniquity, / I moralize two meanings in one word’</i> - he is more subtle and human.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Meta-theatrical historiography: Richards’ meta-theatrical role as conducting a <i>“direful pageant”</i> playing a range of roles from loving brother, desperate lover, benevolent statesman and protector of the crown.</li> </ul>	<p>instruct and preserve and uphold core values. The play confronts the audience with the personal and social costs of the suppression of morality and traditional Christian values in the pursuit of individual power.</p>		
<p><b>Social Context:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Religion:</b> Secularism and free will vs. providentialism: Shakespeare’s times reflect a shift from humanity’s unquestioned relationship with God to a more secular exploration and fascination of what it is to be an individual with free will. As Hamlet wisely observes <i>‘What piece of work is a man?’</i> Richard is a blend of the providential Vice character and the secular Machiavel. He represents symbolically the tension between medieval religious pre-determinism and Renaissance humanism. Elizabeth continued her father’s support of Protestantism.</li> <li>▪ <b>Women:</b> Subjugated and marginalised, however, Queen Elizabeth was recognised as a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Protestantism and humanism:</b> The Protestant movement questioned and challenged the power and control of the Catholic Church. This enabled humanism to flourish. Unlike the Catholic faith, humanism did not promote the notion that humans were innately sinful. The emphasis was on the search for meaning and reason. Richard proudly accepts his iniquity and through the soliloquies allows the audience to follow his reasoning and his machinations.</li> <li>▪ Shakespeare captures the strength and wisdom of Elizabeth through his women</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social Context:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Religion:</b> Secular society, therefore, Pacino is not so fascinated with the tension between God’s will and man’s will. He focuses on Richard’s ambitions and how far he is prepared to go to achieve absolute power.</li> <li>▪ <b>Women:</b> Liberated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but not a focus of the documentary. However, like the women in the play, the actresses convey significant messages. They remind the others about the importance of immersing oneself in a part and of the beauty and lyricism of Shakespeare’s language.</li> <li>▪ <b>Communication:</b> Pacino reminds the audience that the meaning and beauty of language had been compromised in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Communication:</b> Postmodern and existential texts remind us of how the meaning of language has been debased. Communication has been compromised. Pacino, the Black America panhandler and Redgrave lament what has been lost. <i>‘If we think words are things and we have no feelings in our words and then we say things to each other that don’t mean anything. But if we felt what we said, we’d say less and mean more.’</i> <i>‘The music, literally, I mean the music and the thoughts and the concepts and the feelings have not been divorced from the words, and in England you’ve had centuries in which word</i></li> </ul>

<p>formidable leader. She encouraged noble men to educate their daughters. She spoke many foreign languages and was an accomplished writer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Language:</b> There has been a rapid expansion of the language with the addition of many foreign words, new formations of words by adding suffixes, prefixes and compounds. The rebirth of classic literature encouraged writers to include intertextual links to mythology.</li> </ul>	<p>who are the voice of morality and reason. Anne, the Duchess and Elizabeth – the Three Marys of the Resurrection - as the forces of predestination, fate and divine retribution against Richard's sacrilegious actions. Despite the limitations, women had more freedom in the Elizabethan period than they had had previously. The Renaissance brought with it a new way of thinking that men and women could achieve anything and that their capacity for knowledge was limitless. Noble women were given an impressive education in the classics, mathematics, and all other academic subjects of the day.</p>		<p><i>has been totally divorced from truth and that's a problem for us actors.'</i></p>
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